

ORTHODOX BROTHERLY NATIONS & COMMUNITIES

# “17th annual Sydney Greek-Serbian Orthodox & Cultural Friendship Day”

Sunday 26 September 2010

A fantastic and memorable event!!

If it is one day that the Greek and the Serbian communities come together as a united community in Sydney on an annual basis and celebrate the religious Orthodox Christian ties as well as those historical, cultural and geographical ties, this is the traditional “Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day”. This year was the 17th continuous celebration held at the Serbian Orthodox Church and Parish Community of “St Archdeacon Stephen” at Rooty Hill, next to Blacktown last Sunday 26 September 2010 on an absolutely beautiful spring day. The initiative belongs to the Serbian community who started this popular annual event to show its appreciation to the brother Greek nation and Greek Diaspora community for the latter’s invaluable moral, psychological and humane assistance towards the Serbian families and children caught up in the wars of the ex Yugoslavia in the 1990’s and in particular in Bosnia-Hercegovina as well as Serbia proper with the NATO and US led bombings later that decade. The Greeks were the only nation to assist their Orthodox kin in the Balkans and try to heal the wounds of the tragic wars that engulfed the ex Yugoslavia after its western pushed dismemberment. Even today, the question of the Serbian Kosovo region is a place that creates instability as it was propelled to independence without any significant considerations about the Serbian historical and religious ties to this particular part of the Balkans. At present, in Macedonia region of northern Greece and elsewhere, many Greek families host Serbian families and children in particular affected by the war. Despite the time lapse, the wounds embedded in the Serbian nation are still evident. Lately, also on a political and governmental level, Greece is assisting Serbia to make a transition to the European institutions whilst showing respect for Serbia’s issues.

Greece and Cyprus were praised by the organisers for their help and blessed alongside Serbia of course, by the incumbent Serbian priest of the Serbian



Irini Lantis Choreographer of Fotia Greek Dance Group



Orthodox Church and Parish of “St Archdeacon Stephen” at the morning Christian Orthodox Doxology and Liturgy. Following the Orthodox Christian church service, the congregation, Serbs and Greeks as well as some Russians and Bulgarians who were in attendance, made their way to the Parish Hall, the largest of all Sydney Serbian halls and Sydney Greek halls and clubs too. The Hall was adorned in flags from Greece, Cyprus, Serbia, the European Union and the Macedonian Star of Vergina whilst signs of the friendship between the Serbs and the Greeks were displayed in both languages across the walls. The ladies’ auxiliary had prepared lots of traditional Serbian meals, including the very tasty cevapcici, shopska salad and other delicacies.

Following the Greek, Serbian and

Australian national anthems played at the commencement of proceedings, Mr Ilija Glisic, a very active member of the Serbian community welcomed everyone to the event. Mr Glisic emphasised in his speech the ties between the two nations and communities and in particular for Greece’s and Cyprus’ invaluable assistance towards the Serbian orphaned children and families during those tragic times of the Yugoslavian wars. He stressed these are not forgotten by the Serbs and hence this annual event, which reached its 17th year of running, is dedicated to the two Sydney and Australia wide diaspora communities. He thanked the co organisers, Ms Ljubica Ridley on behalf of the Serbian Community and Mr Dimitrios Kametopoulos on behalf of the Greek community for their hard coordination of the event and their tireless efforts over the years! The President of GAPA (Greek Australian Professional association) Ms Katerina Kouvas spoke to the hundreds gathered there and reiterated the close ties between the two communities and nations. She also read out a poem on Greek mythology and history and its significance on the world. In addition, as a Peloponnesian herself and on Peloponnesian committees, she also invited the Serbs to sense the Peloponnesian culture of southern Greece during the upcoming Peloponnesian Sydney Festival.

The official program was introduced and carried through with lots of doses of humour by the Masters of Ceremonies, Ms Sonja Stankovic and Mr Dimitrios Kametopoulos in English, Serbian and Greek commencing with many Serbian Dancing groups. They made their way from various Sydney Serbian clubs and Serbian Orthodox Church Parishes from Bonnyrigg, Alexandria, Granville Mona Vale and as far as Wollongong and elsewhere demonstrating exuberant traditional Serbian dances from various regions such as Kosovo, Shumadia, Central Serbia, and Cacak as well as Dalmatia. The dancers’ traditional costumes added a beautiful colour to the flag adorned

stage with the lights shining upon the performances.

From the Greek community, the Pontian dancing group “Argonauts” led and choreographed by Efthymios Avgetidis, danced first making sure that Pontian sounds were heard loud and clear as the group performed with the traditional lyra played by Giorgios Apostolidis and the drum by Panayiotis. One of the performers, Panayiotis Kouvelis upon being asked about the Pontian costume and what it meant, explained its various components and stressed that the defences it had woven onto it, symbolised the struggle of the Pontian Greeks against the Ottomans in the Pontus area of modern day Turkey. The group donning Pontian costumes danced to songs that touch every Greeks’ heart as the sounds “spoke” of virility and strength of the soul. The next Greek community group “Fotia” from the Cyprus Hellene Club at Brighton Le Sands performed with the “fresh” look of young girls and boys dancing to Cretan, Peloponnesian and Macedonian songs as well as Modern Greek songs. The group was led and choreographed by Irini Lantis.

Their liveliness was applauded continuously by the cheering crowd, testimony to the excitement they created. Both Greek choreographers were presented with special icons of “St Stefan” as a token for their contribution at the 17th Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day.

With the two and a half hour official stage dancing program over, everyone joined in to dance till the early evening hours to the endless traditional Serbian “kolo” and modern Serbian songs as well as from the Greek side, dancing to traditional Zorba, exciting the crowd and to traditional Thracian and Macedonian, Cyprian and Aegean songs.

Everyone vowed to meet again at the end of September of 2011 to celebrate this special bond between the Serbs and the Greeks for the 18th annual Greek Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day.

Dimitris Kametopoulos

